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ABSTRACT

A total of 330 parents of preschool children were given Wrightsman's Philosophy of Nature Instrument, a measure developed to assess the expectancies people have about others' behavior. The instrument consists of 14 items for each of six subscales assessing trustworthiness, altruism, independence, strength of will, complexity, and variability. Because the combination of the first four subscales has been shown to represent an individual's overall view of the positiveness or negativeness of human nature, the last two subscales were not used. On the basis of their scores, parents were categorized as viewing others as moral, immoral, or amoral. They were then given the Parent Attitude Research Instrument, a measure assessing parental child-rearing attitudes. Demographic data were also obtained. Findings suggested that (1) parents who view humankind as moral tend to be relatively permissive in child-rearing attitudes; (2) parents who view humankind as immoral tend to be relatively authoritarian in their child-rearing attitudes; and (3) parents who view humankind as amoral tend to be relatively moderate in their child-rearing attitudes. (RH)

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The Impact of Parental Views of the Nature of Humankind Upon Child-rearing Attitudes

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ABSTRACT

Three hundred thirty parents of preschool children were given Wrightsman's Philosophy of Nature Instrument. On the basis of their scores, these parents were placed in three groups: Moral, Immoral and Amoral. They were then given the Parent Attitude Research Instrument. The parent groups were then treated using a multivariate analysis of covariance which revealed group differences at .0001. Univariate F-tests were performed on each of the PARI subscales and post-hoc Tukey tests were performed. The results indicated that the more negative the parental view of human nature, the more authoritarian were their child-rearing attitudes.

In the past theorists and researchers in the field of child development have indicated that the preschool years were of tremendous significance in terms of personality development. White (1975) stated "the child's character is shaped by his identification with his parents during his earliest years, and through such identification, he accepts and assimilates their values, beliefs and patterns of behavior" (p. 31). Dreikurs (1964) wrote in a similar vein when he said, "He absorbs the parental values, mores and conventions, and tries to fit within the pattern" (p. 19). Stone and Church (1973) said, "Perhaps the most important single principle of human development is the self-fulfilling prophecy which says simply that our children become what we expect them to become" (p. 205). Allport (1961) concluded that the young child's sense of self is simply a product of the way in which parents perceive him.

Others have stated that views of the nature of humankind had an impact upon mental health and child-rearing issues. Mowrer (1957), while addressing the Academy of Religion and Mental Health, called for new studies of the relationship between mental health and the philosophy of human nature. Dinkmeyer and Dreikurs (1963) stated, "When one is concerned with the task of understanding and influencing behavior, one operates on certain assumptions about the nature of man" (p. 7). Gordon (1980) stated, "Much of cultural identity is closely tied to religious identity . . Each group has its own cultural goals and traditions, from which its patterns of child-rearing flow" (p. 2). This study was based on the following assumptions: persons who view others as basically bad are relatively authoritarian in their child-rearing attitudes, persons who think that others are basically good are relatively permissive in their child-rearing attitudes, persons who view others as neither good nor bad

are relatively moderate in their child-rearing attitudes.

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at the .05 level of significance. There is no significant difference among the parents' scores on each of the following variables when parents are grouped according to their view of the nature of humankind as moral, immoral, and amoral: Child-Rearing Attitudes, Encouraging Verbalization, Fostering Dependency, Seclusion of the Parent, Breaking the Will, Martyrdom, Fear of Harming the Child, Marital Conflict, Strictness, Irritability, Excluding Outside Influence, Deification, Suppression of Aggression, Rejection of Homemaking Role, Equalitarianism, Approval of Activity, Avoidance of Communication, Inconsideratedness of Spouse, Suppression of Sex, Ascendance of the Parent, Intrusiveness, Comradeship and Sharing, Acceleration of Development, Dependency of Parent.

This study is limited to: a randomly selected sample of parents of pre-school children residing in Cleburne, Texas, the limitations of pencil and paper questionnaires, specifically Wrightsman's Philosophy of Human Nature Instrument (WPHNI) and the Parent Attitude Research Instrument (PARI), and attitudes and perceptions of the parent surveyed and may not be accurate indications of behavior.

Definitions

The moral view of the nature of humankind is that people are born essentially good, the immoral view of the nature of humankind is that people are born essentially bad, and the amoral view of the nature of humankind is that people are born neither good nor bad, but that goodness or badness is the product of learning and experience (Thomas, (1979).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The basic issue is whether human beings come into the world essentially immoral, moral or amoral. These views are best represented by the thoughts of Calvin, Pelagius and Arminius.

John Calvin believed that the entire human race became essentially depraved because of the sin of disobedience on the part of Adam in the Garden of Eden (Dillenberger, 1975, p. 159). Because of this flaw in their character, human beings were thought to be incapable of issuing forth any good of their own design. Hundreds of years before the birth of John Calvin, an Irish monk by the name of Pelagius settled in Rome. He was greatly upset over the moral state of the Romans. About the year A.D. 400, he began to preach that people were good (Latourette, 1954, p. 185). Jacob Arminius claimed that man was not totally depraved and, therefore, was able to make efforts in both the directions of goodness and evilness (Harrison, 1974).

These views were translated into educational philosophies by the Puritans, Rousseau and Locke. A group of people who wanted to purify the Church of England became the leading proponents of the Calvinistic view of the nature of humankind. Their religious belief that humans were essentially immoral had an impact upon their child-rearing practices and upon their educational philosophies. Even though they believed children to be innately vile, they "did not hesitate to nourish them with threats, moralizing and the whip" (Thomas, 1979, p. 55). Jean Jacque Rousseau became the disciple, in an educational sense, of the ancient monk Pelagius. Rousseau said, "All things are as good as they came from the hands of their creator" (1955, p. 1). He also believed that children, left to their own devices, were naturally curious, not evil. They would, therefore,

make some bad choices, but bad choices would not make children evil, just human (Thomas, 1979). This is very nearly Pelagius' view of what happened to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The British philosopher John Locke believed that children were born into the world with characters that resembled blank tablets, or tabula rasa, upon which experience would inscribe its indelible lessons (Stone & Church, 1973).

METHODOLOGY

The sample was composed of 330 of the total population of 2,205 parents of preschool children who were residing within the city limits of Cleburne, Texas, and who currently had at least one preschool child living in their homes. The sampling technique was stratified random sampling. It was stratified by race and sex of parent within each census tract in the city. Subjects were given three instruments: Wrightsman's Philosophy of Human Nature Instrument, Parent Attitude Research Instrument, and Background Information Form.

The first instrument was developed by Wrightsman (1964) to assess the philosophy of human nature, conceived of as the expectancies which people have about the ways in which others behave. It consists of 84 items, 14 for each of the six subscales: (a) trustworthiness, (b) altruism, (c) independence, (d) strength of will, (e) complexity, and (f) variability. Wrightsman has shown that the scores on the first four subscales can be combined to indicate an overall view of the positiveness or negativeness of human nature, therefore, the last two subscales were not used in keeping with the purpose of this study. Robinson and Shaver (1973) reported split-half and test-retest reliabilities, for the WPHNI, with inter-subscale correlations. Wrightsman (1974) established long-term reliability of the WPHNI. Wrightsman (1974) reported that "a number

of predictions about hypothesized differences in favorableness about human nature were confirmed." Nottingham, Gorsuch, and Wrightsman (1970) did a factoral replication of the theoretically derived subscales and reported that the first four subscales, the subscales to be used in this study were well replicated in the factor structure.

The second instrument was developed by Schaefer and Bell (1958) to assess parental child-rearing attitudes. It consists of 115 items, five for each of the 23 subscales. Each item is presented in a standard A - a - d - D form. It is, therefore, a forced choice instrument. Total scores can vary from 20 to f on each of the 23 subscales or from a total score of 460 to 115.

The third instrument contained questions designed to discover the subject's sex, race, educational level, marital status and income level.

Procedure

The appropriate sample by race and sex in each census tract was written on pieces of paper and given to the author's research assistants. Randomization was insured by numbering the houses in each census tract starting at the upper left side and then selecting the houses to be approached by consulting a table of random numbers. The author's research assistants then approached each house asking the occupants who had preschool children in their family to fill out the WPHNI, PARI and BIF. They continued to survey until the appropriate percentages of both sexes and of each ethnic group were reached. Any category of respondents which exceeded the numbers represented in the appropriate sample were brought to the correct level by randomly discarding the necessary number of research packets. Questionnaires which were incomplete were also discarded. Parents were placed in three groups according to their view of the nature of humankind

as revealed by their scores on WPHNI. Group 1 was comprised of those parents who scored +10 or more (moral), Group 2 was made up of parents who scored -10 or less (immoral), and Group 3 contained the parents who scored between +9 and -9 (amoral).

FINDINGS

A multivariate analysis of covariance was performed among the groups on the 23 child-rearing attitude subscales of PARI, with race, sex, marital status entered as dichotomous dummy variables in the usual manner for the case of multi-level nominal variables. Hotelling's T^2 was calculated and the results were $T^2 = .47047$, $F = 3.00692$, $\underline{P} = < .0001$. This indicates that an overall significant difference exists among parents' child-rearing attitudes when parents are grouped according to their views of the nature of humankind as moral, immoral, and amoral. Univariate F-tests were performed on each of the 23 parents' subscales of PARI. The results are reported in Table 1. Tukey pair-wise comparisons (at the .05 level of significance) were computed to examine for specific group differences (see Table 2).

DISCUSSION

The first major finding of this study was that there was no significant difference among parent groups on the variables of Strictness, Equalitarianism, and Dependency of Parent. An explanation for the variable of Strictness could be that which was proposed by Rokeach (1960). He has theorized that there may be two types of authoritarianism: one which is negatively oriented and the other which is positively oriented. It may well be that parents who have moral or amoral views of the nature of humankind hold those views just as strictly as did those who viewed others as essentially immoral (range 14.03-14.77).

A rather different dynamic seems to have been operating on the variable of Equalitarianism. It appears that parents in each group believed very strongly that children were equal to themselves (range 14.84-15.03). This result is quite inconsistent with parent group scores on other variables that measure parent authoritarianism such as Breaking the Will, Excluding Outside Influences, Suppression of Aggression, Suppression of Sex, and Acceleration of Development. On each of these variables, parents in Group 1 (moral) scored lowest, Group 2 (immoral) parents scored highest, and parents in Group 3 (amoral) scored moderately. The author interprets this result to be effected by the social desirability of equality. Still another dynamic seems to have been operating on the variable of Dependency of Parents. It appears that the parents in the entire sample did not tend to be dependent upon their children. The support for this can be seen by looking at the relatively low scores which all of the parent groups gave on this variable (range 13.37-13.63).

A second major result of this study is that parents who viewed others as moral scored highest on the variables of Encouraging Verbalization, Marital Conflict and Comradeship and Sharing, while they scored lowest on the variables of Fostering Dependency, Seclusion of the Parent, Breaking the Will, Martyrdom, Fear of Harming the Child, Irritability, Excluding Outside Influence, Deification, Suppression of Aggression, Rejection of Homemaking Role, Approval of Activity, Avoidance of Communication, Ascendance of the Parent, Intrusiveness, Acceleration of Development, and Suppression of Sex. These findings are generally consistent with the author's basic assumption that parents who see human nature as basically moral will be relatively permissive in their child-rearing attitudes. In this study these parents were revealed to be persons who typically allowed children

to be themselves. The only pressure which they placed on their children was to express themselves. A somewhat surprising result is that these parents experience more marital conflict than do parents in other groups. This may not be as surprising as it first appears, however. Marital conflict may be a direct result of these parents' willingness to allow others to be who they are. As evidence for this possibility, one need only remember that these are the same parents who scored low on both the variable of Suppression of Aggression and Inconsideration of Spouse. This is somewhat consistent with the practice recommended by many authorities in the field of child-rearing (Dreikurs, 1964; Kelly, 1962; Maslow, 1962).

A third major finding of this study is that parents who view others as basically immoral are relatively authoritarian in their child-rearing attitudes. This group scored highest on the variables of Fostering Dependency, Breaking the Will, Martyrdom, Fear of Harming the Child, Irritability, Excluding Outside Influence, Deification, Suppression of Aggression, Approval of Activity, Avoidance of Communication, Inconsiderateness of the Spouse, Suppression of Sex, Ascendance of the Parent, Intrusiveness, and Acceleration of Development. This group scored lowest on Encouraging Verbalization, Rejection of Homemaking Role, Marital Conflict, and Comradeship and Sharing. In general this group of parents did not allow their children to be who they were. These results show the impact of negative views of the nature of humankind upon child-rearing attitudes in the manner which the author assumed they would. This is perhaps most strikingly conveyed by their exclusion of outside influence. This is consistent with Kelley's (1962) understanding that persons who feel that others are no good will exhibit a desire to force others to behave in ways which are

acceptable to themselves. It is also consistent with Brody's (1964) research which shows that highly authoritarian persons tend to restrict outside influences. As added support for the author's assumptions, this group of parents scored highest on Avoidance of Communication, while scoring lowest on the variables of Encouraging Verbalization, Comradeship and Sharing, and moderately on Seclusion of the Parent. The author interprets this to mean that these parents are not close to their children or to others. This may be due to the fear that allowing their children or others to be close will cause them to be perceived as they perceive themselves, as no good. This could also explain the fact that this group scored lowest in Marital Conflict while scoring highest on the variable of Inconsiderateness of the Spouse. Another dynamic evidenced by this group of parents is the high score of Martyrdom, Irritability, and Deification. This result could be explained by the concept of projective identification, as set forth by Feldman (1982) which is described as the splitting of the intropsychic self into good and bad representations. He said, "In conflicted marriages projection is mobilized as a defense which involves projecting these 'all-bad' self representations upon the spouse. The 'all-good' other representation is retained, leading to an experience of self as the victim. The 'all-good' other representation is projected upon a lover or a child " (p. 419).

A final major finding of this study was that parents who saw others as basically amoral most often scored significantly different from both the other parenting groups, but lower than those who saw others as basically moral and higher than those who saw others as essentially immoral. This means that there is a direct relationship between the degree of parents' belief in the nature of

humankind issues and their parenting scores on these variables. It is the author's impression that this group of parents tended to score moderately on both WPHNI and PARI and may reflect a rather moderate orientation toward life in general.

Based upon the findings of this study, the following conclusions are drawn: parents who have moral views of the nature of humankind tend to be relatively permissive in their child-rearing attitudes, parents who have an immoral view of the nature of humankind tend to be relatively authoritarian in their child-rearing attitudes, and parents who have an amoral view of the nature of humankind tend to be relatively moderate in their child-rearing attitudes.

Table 1

Univariate Analysis of Covariance of the Moral, Immoral, and Amoral Groups in the PARI Subscales

Variable	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	F[a]	P
Encouraging Verbalization	16.11	15.30	15.29	5.35590	.005
Fostering Dependency	10.54	12.04	10.75	9.35521	.000
Seclusion of the Parent	10.94	12.99	13.13	21.97811	.000
Breaking of the Will	11.05	12.61	12.01	9.04198	.000
Martyrdom	10.91	12.99	12.39	15.39572	.000
Fear of Harming the Child	13.30	14.11	14.60	6.17171	.002
Marital Conflict	15.19	14.41	15.00	2.99440	.050
Strictness	14.03	14.25	14.77	1.72964	.179
Irritability	13.74	14.53	14.42	3.02511	.050
Excluding Outside Influences	11.44	12.77	11.99	7.19547	.001
Deification	12.59	13.60	12.98	4.76644	.009
Suppression of Aggression	12.10	12.97	12.46	3.80708	.023
Rejection of Homemaking Role	12.45	13.50	12.34	6.41248	.002
Equalitarianism	15.03	14.84	15.01	.24788	.174
Approval of Activity	12.51	13.54	13.19	4.48861	.012
Avoidance of Communication	10.58	12.41	11.26	10.20917	.000
Inconsiderateness of Spouse	13.12	13.94	13.97	4.80191	.009
Suppression of Sex	10.09	12.02	10.81	11.32485	.000
Ascendance of the Parent	13.11	13.88	13.83	3.49599	.031
Intrusiveness	11.05	12.26	11.95	5.92514	.007
Comradeship and Sharing	16.48	15.69	16.69	5.11654	.007
Acceleration of Development	10.93	13.35	11.12	20.36249	.000
Dependency of Parent	13.37	13.49	13.63	.23595	.790

[a]Degrees of Freedom = (2,327).

Table 2

Tukey Pair-Wise Comparisions of Group 2 (Immoral)

and Group 3 (Amoral) on the PARI Subscales

Variable	Group 1		Group 2		Group 3
Ecouraging Verbalization	16.11	>	15.30	=	15.29
Fostering Dependency	10.54	<	12.04	>	10.75
Seclusion of the Parent	10.94	<	12.99	>	13.13
Breaking of the Will	11.05	<	12.61	>	12.01
Martyrdom	10.91	<	12.99	>	12.39
Fear of Harming the Child	13.30	<	14.11	=	14.60
Marital Conflict	15.19	>	14.41	<	15.00
Strictness	14.03	=	14.25	=	14.77
Irritability	13.74	<	14.53	=	14.42
Excluding Outside Influences	11.44	<	12.77	>	11.99
Deification	12.59	<	13.60	>	12.98
Suppression of Aggression	12.10	<	12.97	>	12.46
Rejection of Homemaking Role	12.45	<	13.50	>	12.34
Equalitarianism	15.03	=	14.84	=	15.01
Approval of Activity	12.51	<	13.54	>	13.19
Avoidance of Communication	10.58	<	12.41	>	11.26
Inconsiderateness of Spouse	13.12	<	13.94	=	13.97
Suppression of Sex	10.09	<	12.02	>	10.81
Ascendance of the Parent	13.11	<	13.88	=	13.83
Intrusiveness	11.05	<	12.26	>	11.95
Comradeship and Sharing	16.48	>	15.69	<	16.69
Acceleration of Development	10.93	<	13.35	>	11.12
Dependency of Parent	13.37	=	13.49	=	13.63

[a]Degrees of Freedom = (2,327).

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